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ABSTRACT

Prince George's Community College (PGCC), in Maryland, has monitored minority student performance for over a decade, and has several programs in place to assist minority students in their endeavors at the college. The college's enrollment has always reflected the demographics of Prince George's County, mirroring the rapid changes in the county's racial composition over the past 20 years. In fall 1993, black students accounted for 58% of PGCC's credit headcount, with half of the college's engineering department consisting of Black students. Minority student enrollment increased 40% between 1987 and 1993, while White student enrollment declined 36%. Studies have found that about a fourth of the students entering PGCC each fall attend only one semester. Many other students have patterns of interrupted attendance. Three-fifths of the students starting PGCC in the fall return for the following spring semester, with Asian students demonstrating the highest fall-to-spring retention rates (69%) and Black students the lowest (56%). In fall 1993, graduation rates for both Whites (15.9%) and Blacks (5.1%) were at all-time lows, with the graduation rate for Blacks being half what it was 8 years before. The last three African American cohorts have transferred at a steady rate of 14-15%, while Whites have had dramatically higher rates (40%) of the 1988 cohort had transferred within 4 years of entry to PGCC). In all placement tests (reading, composition, and three mathematics subtests, Black students had the lowest average scores. PGCC has four programs designed to improve minority improvement, including special testing and advisement services for high school students, a recruitment program for disadvantaged and disabled vocational high school students, and programs designed to draw minority students into science, mathematics, engineering and biomedical fields. (MAB)

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Minority Student Achievement Report

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Office of Institutional Research and Analysis

Report BT94-3

September 1993

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PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Office of Institutional Research and Analysis

MINORITY STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT REPORT

Report BT94-3
September 1993

Introduction

The Maryland Higher Education Commission has identified improving minority student achievement as a priority planning initiative. Prince George's Community College has monitored minority student performance for over a decade, and has several programs in place--including some nationally recognized ones--to assist minority students in their endeavors at the College. This annual report examines minority student enrollment, retention, graduation, and transfer, and concludes with descriptions of several instructional support services designed to promote student success at PGCC.

Enrollment

The College's enrollment has always reflected the demographics of Prince George's County. As the County's racial composition rapidly changed over the past 20 years, the College's enrollment mirrored that change. In Fall 1993, black students accounted for 58 percent of PGCC's credit headcount. Minority student enrollment increased 40 percent between 1987 and 1993. Enrollment of white students declined 36 percent during this time (see Table 1).

Credit Headcount, by Race/Ethnicity, Fall 1987-93

Fall	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Nat. Am.	White	Total
1993	740	7,525	307	85	4,298	12,955
1992	758	7,376	313	76	4,795	13,318
1991	707	6,957	296	67	5,280	13,307
1990	668	6,337	304	58	5,720	13,087
1989	640	6,241	310	56	6,134	13,381
1988	585	5,991	284	50	6,533	13,443
1987	522	5,385	223	58	6,694	12,882

Table 1

In addition to monitoring overall enrollment of minority students, at the request of MHEC the College is also tracking minority enrollment in engineering. The Commission wants to monitor and promote minority student participation in programs characteristically having low minority enrollment. In Fall 1993, half of the College's engineering students were black, the highest proportion ever (see Table 2).

Black Students Majoring in Engineering, Fall 1988-93

Fall	Total Engineering Students	Black Students Number	Black Students Percent
1993	279	140	50%
1992	302	131	43
1991	327	130	40
1990	313	114	36
1989	326	120	37
1988	319	103	32

Table 2

Student Retention

Studies at PGCC have found that about a fourth of the students entering the College each fall attend only one semester. Many other students have interrupted patterns of attendance. Community college students may have a goal of taking only a course or two, or may move over the County line and (due to tuition differentials) re-enroll at a neighboring community college. The typical adult student, juggling job and family responsibilities, may have to sit out a semester due to financial or time constraints. Such circumstances must be kept in mind when interpreting traditional measures of student retention.

Because many students have short-term goals, and because the transition to the second semester is a period of high attrition, the research office regularly monitors the fall-to-spring retention of new students. Three-fifths of the students starting their college careers at PGCC in the fall return for classes the following spring (see Table 3). Asian students typically have had the highest fall-to-spring retention rates; for 1992-93, Asian students had a 69 percent return rate, ten percentage points above the collegewide average. Black students had the lowest group retention rate, at 56 percent.

Fall - to - Spring Retention Rates, First-time Students

	Fall 1991 - Spring 1992			Fall 1992 - Spring 1993		
	Entered Fall 91	Returned Spring 92	Percent	Entered Fall 92	Returned Spring 93	Percent
Total	2,543	1,514	60%	2,563	1,500	59%
Asian	160	124	78%	137	94	69%
Black	1,462	829	57	1,531	860	56
Hispanic	70	39	56	76	46	61
Nat. Amer.	20	12	60	21	15	71
White	831	510	61	798	485	61

Table 3

Graduation and Transfer Rates

The conventional measures of community college student achievement are completion of the Associate's degree or transfer to a four-year college or university for continued study. Staff at the Maryland Higher Education Commission, using state enrollment and degree reporting systems, annually report the graduation and transfer status of full-time students four years after entry to state community colleges. These "four years after" data are available for African American and white students, but due to their small numbers, are not meaningful for the other racial/ethnic groups. MHEC has provided this information for entering fall cohorts beginning in 1980, allowing for trend analysis.

Both black and white student cohorts have experienced declining rates of degree attainment (see Figure 1). The overall graduation rate for the most recent cohort for which data were available, students entering PGCC in Fall 1988, was 10.6 percent. The graduation rates for both whites (15.9 percent) and blacks (5.1 percent) were at all-time lows. The graduation rate for African Americans was half what it was eight years earlier.

Transfer rates have had a different pattern (see Figure 2). The last three African American cohorts have transferred at a steady rate of 14-15 percent, slightly higher than the rates of earlier cohorts. White students have had dramatically higher transfer rates in recent years. Forty percent of the 1988 cohort had transferred within four years of entry to PGCC, the highest transfer rate on record and over ten percentage points above the rate achieved by the 1984 entering cohort.

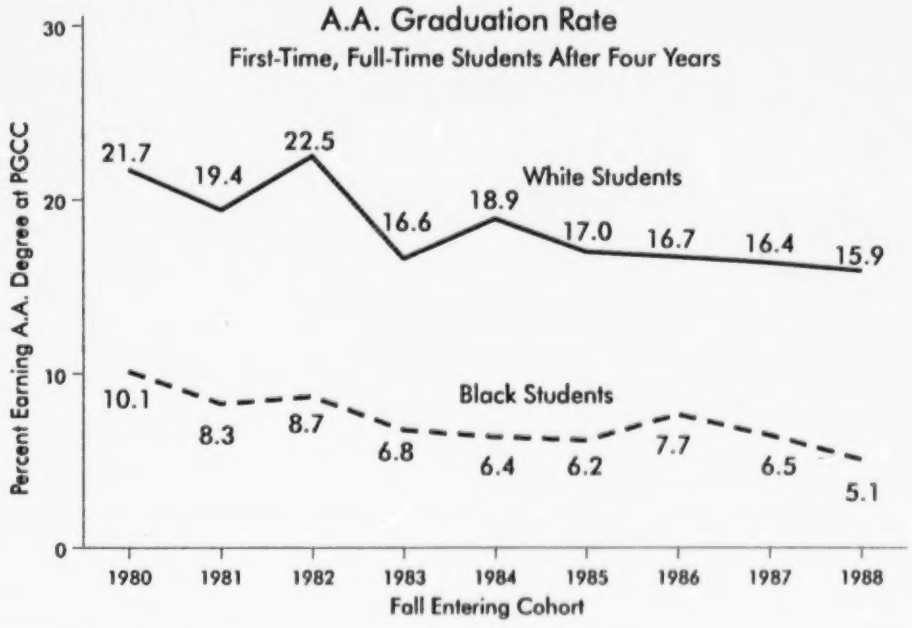

Figure 1

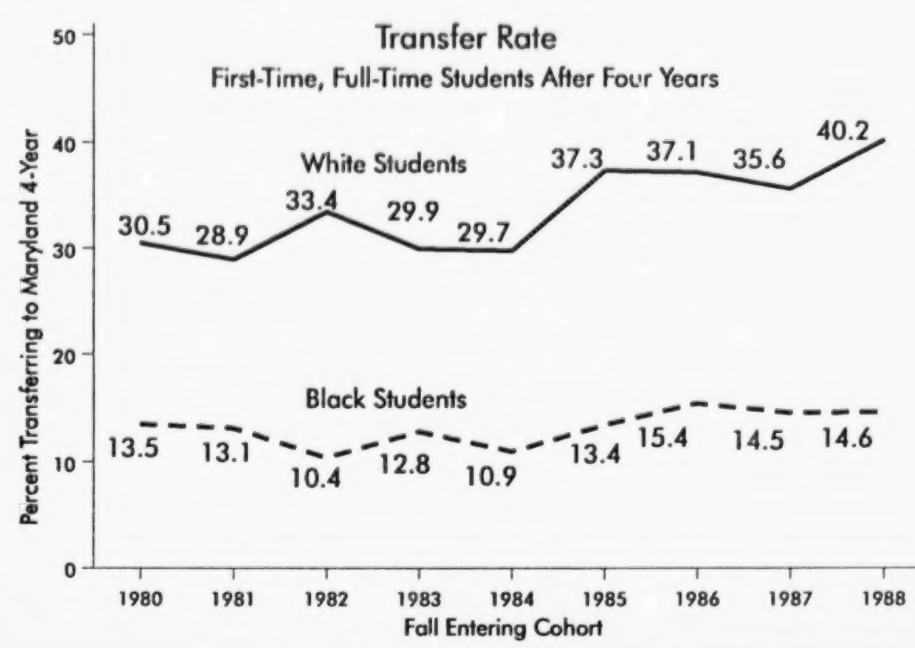

Figure 2

Placement Test Scores

The persistent racial/ethnic group differences in academic performance in college, found in national studies as well as at PGCC, may be related to differences in educational background and basic academic skill levels. At PGCC, the group results of placement testing of basic skills are reflected in subsequent group classroom performance. Of course, this relationship may not hold for individual students. Many factors other than basic English and math skills can influence academic success. These include student motivation and effort, study and test-taking skills, family and job situations, faculty teaching and grading practices, and the social or emotional "fit" between a student and the institution.

Placement Test Scores, Fall 1992 Entrants

		Number Tested	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Reading				
	White	591	16.53	4.37
	Hispanic	45	13.60	4.76
	Asian	69	12.80	5.06
	Black	1,085	11.91	5.25
English				
	White	580	17.31	4.21
	Asian	67	14.91	5.08
	Hispanic	43	13.98	5.42
	Black	1,084	13.25	5.35
Arithmetic Skills				
	White	189	13.32	5.26
	Asian	7	11.29	5.22
	Hispanic	14	10.21	6.41
	Black	548	9.40	4.58
Elementary Algebra				
	White	244	11.97	5.64
	Asian	56	11.77	6.38
	Hispanic	21	11.00	4.96
	Black	394	8.33	5.49
Advanced Mathematics				
	Asian	47	54.21	21.26
	White	150	44.78	17.72
	Hispanic	13	40.62	13.81
	Black	146	35.94	15.80

Table 4

Acknowledging that basic skills at college entry are not the complete answer, nevertheless the pattern of placement test scores does parallel the pattern in retention, graduation, and transfer outcomes. Table 4 displays the placement test score means and standard deviations of new students entering PGCC in Fall 1992. In all five tests reported (reading, composition, and three mathematics subtests), black students had the lowest average scores.

The distribution of students across the three mathematics tests is also instructive. When students come to the testing center, they are asked how much algebra they have had, and how recently. If they have not had algebra, they are given the T30 arithmetic test to determine proper placement in developmental mathematics. Students who have had algebra are encouraged to take the T50 elementary algebra test. Passing the T50 allows students to enroll in credit math classes and other classes with a math skill prerequisite. Students who score below the threshold score (currently 10) on the T50 may take a re-test or take the T30 arithmetic test for placement in an appropriate developmental course. Since re-tests rarely result in a more than one or two point improvement in T50 scores, unless a student just misses the cut-off he or she is urged to take the T30. As can be seen in Table 4, half of the African American students had scores on the T30 arithmetic skills test, an indication of poor academic preparation in mathematics.

Institutional Programs to Support Student Achievement

Listed below are some of the activities the College has implemented to help improve minority achievement. The activities have been organized under headings of activities designed to improve (1) minority enrollment; and (2) minority retention and graduation.

Improving Minority Enrollment

Special Testing and Advisement

Number of participants annually: 1,100

A joint effort of the Prince George's County public school system and the College's recruitment office, the program permits the College to inform high school juniors and seniors of its programs, services and placement testing requirement. The schools permit students to sign-up in their schools for a testing date on the College's campus. Following the test, the College's counseling staff visits each school to provide an orientation session for all tested students. Each tested student also gets an individual advisement session with a counselor or advisor.

Bridge to Success

Number of participants annually: 90

The Bridge to Success program recruits disadvantaged and disabled vocational high school students and provides transitional services to improve their retention at the community college. The program includes workshops on postsecondary educational opportunities, assistance in completing admission and financial aid applications, college placement testing and advisement at the high school, campus visits, special academic advisors at the College, and other instructional support services.

PGCC-NASA Collegiate Program

Number of participants annually: 10

Funded by a grant from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the PGCC-NASA Collegiate Program aims to bring more minority students into careers in science, mathematics, and engineering. The program provides full tuition scholarships, a summer bridge program, professional activities, and a paid summer internship at the NASA-Goddard Space Flight Center, for ten new PGCC students annually. After completing two years at PGCC, students transfer to the University of Maryland at College Park for the B.S. degree, in preparation for work at NASA or a NASA-related industry.

Biomedical Minority Access Program

Number of participants annually: 15

BIO MAP, the Biomedical Minority Access Program, is a partnership effort between the University of Maryland at College Park, the University of Maryland Baltimore County, Howard Community College, Montgomery College, and Prince George's Community College, to increase the number of minority students earning B.S. degrees in biomedical fields. Under a grant from the National Institutes of Health, BIO MAP will provide a paid summer internship at either UMCP or UMBC for five PGCC minority students in summer 1994 and 15 PGCC minority students in summer 1995. Additional scholarship assistance and professional enhancement activities are included under the program.

Minority Student Retention Program

Number of participants annually: 300

The Minority Student Retention Program (MSRP) aims to provide appropriate support services and other incentives to enable "at risk" minority students to successfully complete their educational and career goals at the College. Among the major support and retention activities provided in the program are: workshops focusing on college survival skills, peer tutorial services, mentoring, social and cultural activities promoting retention efforts, career assessment and planning, personal adjustment counseling, and participation in a College Success course.

Student Support Services

Number of participants annually: 275

The Student Support Services program provides low-income, first-generation college students, and students with learning and physical disabilities, intensive educational, career, and personal support services. Services include needs assessment, academic, personal, and financial aid counseling, tutorial support, progress monitoring, and coordination of services with other on- and off-campus providers. The program is designed to improve the retention, graduation, and transfer rates of College eligible participants.

Vocational Support Services

Number of participants annually: 2,000

The Vocational Support Services program provides instructional support services, guidance, and counseling to vocational education students. Students are provided assistance through individual and group sessions, as well as workshops, formal supplemental instruction, and classroom presentations. Services include tutoring and writing assistance, plus study skills, test-taking, personal, and career counseling. The program also provides accommodations and adaptive equipment for students with disabilities.

Tutoring Center

Number of participants annually: 2,900

The Tutoring Center provides free supplemental learning assistance to students enrolled in courses in high-risk subject areas. The primary form of assistance is one-on-one tutoring by faculty and staff tutors. Assistance in content areas is also available in the form of small group tutoring, computer-assisted instruction, and a televised tutoring program.

Writing Center

Number of participants annually: 930

The Writing Center offers free one-on-one assistance by trained faculty tutors to any student with a writing assignment in any course. In addition, the Center provides group activities to support successful student writing, such as customized in-class workshops, small-group sessions in the Writing Center, and specific topic workshops including "Organizing the Research Paper," "Using Sources," and "Writing College Papers."

Nursing Supplemental Instruction

Number of participants annually: 300

The Nursing Supplemental Instruction program offers weekly group sessions for each of the four core nursing courses. A team of Biology faculty, Nursing faculty, and a learning specialist conduct the sessions which include a review of anatomy and physiology with nursing applications plus study skills assistance.

Summary

Prince George's Community College is proud of its record of serving all residents of Prince George's County. An extensive set of instructional support services is in place to assist students in their academic endeavors. To the extent possible given resource constraints, the College will continue to offer such services to meet the needs of its diverse student population.